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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1563
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2769
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1132
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3160
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2546
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001201

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (GORKOWSKI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ OPPOSITION KURULTAI FAVORS NEGOTIATION

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Classified By: A/DCM Robert Burgess for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kyrgyzstan's political opposition staged a kurultai, or traditional public meeting, on November 29 in Bishkek. While all of the speakers criticized the government and President Bakiyev, there was a clear division between more moderate elements who called for negotiation with the government, and those who demanded President Bakiyev's immediate ouster. The moderates, led by former Speaker Tekebayev and former MP Sariyev, prevailed in the kurultai's final resolution, which urges the President to implement political reforms by March 2009. However, more radical speakers, such as former Prosecutor General Beknazarov, received a more enthusiastic response from the audience. Several participants criticized the international community for "supporting" Bakiyev. END SUMMARY.

Government Allows Kurultai to Proceed

12. (SBU) Kyrgyzstan's political opposition held a kurultai, or traditional public meeting, on November 29 in Bishkek. Approximately 600 delegates attended the meeting, representing most, but not all, of Kyrgyzstan's political parties. Poloff and Pol FSN, along with a number of other invited international representatives, also attended the meeting.

13. (C) The assembly was organized by the "For Justice" movement, headed by former Foreign Minister Alikbek Jekshenkulov. The government had denied an initial application to hold the event at a sports stadium, which would have permitted several thousand to attend the event, but after one postponement, the government agreed to let the event be held at a theater in central Bishkek, with a capacity of about 600. On the day of the event, there was a heavy police presence on the streets, but there were no reported clashes or serious incidents.

Best Faces Forward?

14. (C) Opposition party leaders sat in a row at the front of the stage, backed by several ranks of flag-waving activists. Speakers represented most of the principal opposition political parties, all of Kyrgyzstan's regions, several NGOs, and the Dungan Chinese community. Each spoke for five minutes. Kurultai organizer Jekshenkulov welcomed participants and, for the first of several times in the course of the meeting, invoked President-elect Barack Obama as an example of the possibility of political change. He was followed in succession by Ata Meken leader Omurbek Tekebayev, Ak Shumkar leader Temir Sariyev, and MP Bakyt Beshimov of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK). Former Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev, leader of the SDPK, sat in the front row, but did not speak.

15. (C) This first group of speaker criticized the government for failure to address socio-economic problems, including high prices and deteriorating social services. They charged that the corruption and regionalism of those in power were undermining development. Nevertheless, they tended to favor negotiation with the current government. In their speeches and in the kurultai's final resolution, they urged Bakiyev to implement reforms and a "new political system" by March 2009, a date previously mentioned for staging demonstrations.

Applause for Revolution

16. (C) The clearest division among the speakers was between those who called for a systemic political change through negotiation with the government, and those who simply

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criticized the government and demanded President Bakiyev's immediate ouster. Members of the People's Revolutionary Committee, most prominently former Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov, spoke in the latter half of the meeting, and did not have seats facing the audience. Beknazarov received the most applause of any speaker when he delivered a message of impatience with the prospect of negotiating with the government, saying "we've been doing this for years -- we're all tired, and we know what to say." He claimed that the people of Kyrgyzstan are ready for decisive action, but the opposition leaders are not. He denigrated the possibility of achieving any real reforms with Bakiyev in office. Nevertheless, the moderates prevailed in the end, with the resolution adopted by the kurultai urging the President to implement their calls for political reform by March 2009, and, if he doesn't, only then raises the possibility of demanding Bakiyev's resignation.

"We Need a New System"

17. (C) Beyond the larger question of whether the opposition, speakers raised a number of points. Former Prime Minister Amangelgy Muraliyev of United Kyrgyzstan won applause from the audience with his demand that no member of the opposition should accept a position within the government. Former Foreign Minister and current SDPK MP Roza Otunbayeva cautioned against too much focus on personalities, saying that "Kyrgyzstan needs an honest system for selecting its leaders." Cholpon Jakupova, director of Adilet Legal Clinic, criticized international organizations for supporting the Bakiyev government. A Dungan community representative decried the government's alleged selling of electricity to other countries. And Vladimir Lisovskiy of the Freedom of Choice party criticized the new religion law for restricting the activities of small Christian churches, and also called for shooting corrupt officials and confining homosexuals and prostitutes to mental hospitals.

Comment

18. (C) Organizers of the kurultai had wanted to unify the political opposition, but the meeting showed continued divisions among the opposition leaders. While the speakers showed a degree of unity in their criticism of the Bakiyev government and in their calls for a new system, there were clear splits as to tactics. The more moderate group openly favored negotiation, but others demanded the President's immediate resignation.

LITZENBERGER